The Best Daughter
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The Best Daughter

Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha*

I'm 22 years old
and my mother doesn't know where I live!
I'm 33 years old
and my mother doesn't know where I live

It's a happy song
a happy little song in my chest:

I am the worst daughter in the world
and the best
I do not visit I will not change
my mother's diapers when she is old
and I will not molest my daughter
the way she did me

I am not the passive voice
Even as a small child
thundercloud blackpurplegold snarlopening
my baby vulva stretched and split
my voice is speaking

My memories are not false. They are mine
Bathroom floor downstairs,
I'm six and all of a sudden
I feel my baby vulva in mine
tiny and pink the feeling is pink bud
touched and bad I call it "my baby feeling"

the baby feeling. the terror in my eyes in every family photograph. the baby feeling.
the secret language. the escape hatch out the top my skull to the pine trees:
all these are real. I submit them as evidence in the court of true justice
that hasn't shown up yet
As admissible as any videotape
I my own expert witness

I know that when my mother touched me

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I am not alone
children boys girls and children both and neither
were being touched by their mamas daddies aunties grandpas right at that moment
terrifying monsters best beloved

I climb. My survival is written in the stars
in the stalls of the Salem Square library branch in the 1980s
in the two old-growth pines behind my house
in all the books I read about children
who ran away. the suitcase packed since 7. the orgasms I learned how to have. honey dust on every lover's pillow. every single second I stayed inside my body.
my story was everywhere. it was smeared in the pine trees, at CVS, every seat on the Chinatown bus, every cheap plane ticket.

when my mother touched my genitals,
she was a ripped-in-half, frightened raging girl
she was a thirty-seven year old woman
she did evil
she was my mother
split open, flying

my mother is still alive
and so am I
and so am I

vico'd out in the house they finally paid off
she doesn't know where I live
and where I live is a house with sari-colored walls open to the sky
a big red bed spilling books
and all the windows open
A door I open
and close

the worst daughter
and the best
my child's heart lifting hope to sky
that she blesses that I made it
finally off south flagg street
finally back in my body
finally all the windows of the house
wide open
and safe

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